United Nations S/PV.3765

Security Council

Fifty-second Year

Provisional

3765th Meeting

Monday, 14 April 1997, 4 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Monteiro	(Portugal)
Members:	Chile	Mr. Somavía
	China	Mr. Wang Xuexian
	Costa Rica	Mr. Sáenz Biolley
	Egypt	Mr. Elaraby
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Guinea-Bissau	Mr. Cabral
	Japan	Mr. Owada
	Kenya	Mr. Mahugu
	Poland	Mr. Matuszewski
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Choi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Sweden	Mr. Osvald
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Weston
	United States of America	Mr. Gnehm

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

97-85377 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one week of the date of publication*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178.

The meeting was called to order at 4:20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representatives of Afghanistan, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Pakistan and Turkey, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Ghafoorzai (Afghanistan) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Rudolph (Germany), Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Terzi di Sant'Agata (Italy), Mr. Biegman (Netherlands), Mr. Kamal (Pakistan) and Mr. Çelem (Turkey), took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 11 April 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that the Security Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Ambassador Engin A. Ansay, Permanent Observer of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations, during the Council's forthcoming discussion of the item entitled 'The situation in Afghanistan'."

That letter will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/1997/305.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to Mr. Engin A. Ansay.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I should like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/1997/240 and Corr.1, which contains the report of the Secretary-General dated 16 March 1997 on the situation in Afghanistan.

The first speaker is the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, on whom I now call.

Mr. Ghafoorzai (Afghanistan): At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April. We are sure that your broad knowledge of international issues and your diplomatic skill will contribute to the successful conduct of the Security Council's work during the month of April. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing President.

I sincerely thank the Council for convening this special meeting on the current situation in Afghanistan.

The last two decades have seen Afghanistan become an issue of concern for the world. Each year, it seems that new dimensions are added to the protracted, annihilating conflict in our country, the land of perilous events and critical circumstances. The desire of the Afghan nation for a durable peace is fading away, with military interventions and corporate interests acting as obstacles to peace rather than catalysts for peace. We believe that if the Afghan problem is not addressed with sincerity and caution, Afghanistan will present the world with serious dangers that will have subsequent ramifications. It is therefore incumbent upon the members of the Council to note that the disastrous destabilizing effects of turmoil in Afghanistan can potentially spill over. With all the good for which the United Nations strives, I am quite confident that a political solution can be found for Afghanistan. Let us all contribute to that solution.

Respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries is a recognized principle of the United Nations Charter and other international instruments. This requires all countries, in their international relations, to refrain from any kind of interference or intervention in the internal affairs of other States and to base their relations with others on the renowned guidelines of equality of States and mutual respect.

Likewise, recruiting, arming, training and dispatching an armed mercenary group assigned to destabilize another country's Government or jeopardize a political process are in violation of recognized principles of international law. Such moves deserve the condemnation of the entire international community, and any effort aimed at legitimizing such a mercenary group and the consequent effects of foreign-sponsored intervention sets dangerous precedents for international relations.

The Taliban qualify as the embodiment of such a mercenary group. In October 1996, I gave an adequate introduction of the Taliban mercenaries to this Council. They support international terrorism and shelter those who finance them. They commit gross and massive violations of human rights, particularly chain-lashing and beating women. As the members of the Council well know, the Taliban cultivate, process and export narcotics. Sadly, one of the new breaches of international humanitarian law committed by the Taliban is a Serbian-style "ethnic cleansing" involving 140,000 non-Pashtun Afghans, as widely reported by *The New York Times*, as well as by both Mr. Norbert Holl, Head of the United Nations Special Mission and Mr. Paik, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Afghanistan. We believe that the latest series of heinous acts constitute crimes of genocide punishable in accordance with relevant conventions.

On 8 April 1997, Mr. Choong Hyun Paik presented a report to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. In his report he informed the Commission of the displacement of 250,000 Afghans from their villages since October 1996. The report also briefed the Commission on mass violations of women's rights committed by the Taliban, including the beating of 225 women because they had not met the Taliban dress code. The women of Afghanistan, who compose more than half the Afghan population, would like their grievances to be heard by the Security Council.

The first sign of ethnic cleansing occurred in Sar-Cheshma, a small village north-west of Kabul, at a time when the Taliban had suffered major setbacks, on 23 October 1996. John Burns of *The New York Times* reminded readers that the razing of villages had already taken place during the 18 years of war in Afghanistan, but that

> "the twist this time was that the men who destroyed Sar-Cheshma were the turbaned warriors of the Taliban, the ultra-conservative Muslims who have imposed a medieval social order across much of Afghanistan ... The villagers of Sar-Cheshma say 30 Taliban fighters swept in at dawn on 23 October, then spent several hours pouring canisters of gasoline into the 120 courtyards, one after another, where hundreds of people live. Little remains but buckled bed frames and melted kitchen utensils".

Regarding the forced exodus of the non-Pashtun civilian population in January, we provided early information to the Security Council in document S/1997/54 of 21 January 1997. Since then the Taliban have forcibly evicted many other villagers from their homes and farms. The total estimate of victims facing forced eviction has since surpassed 150,000. It is the earnest expectation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan that the United Nations will appropriately address these grave violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Taliban. We hope that the United Nations will not spare Taliban advisers, supporters and financiers.

In identical letters dated 13 April 1997 — as recently as yesterday — addressed to the Secretary-General and to you, Sir, I drew the attention of the Security Council to an alarming situation. According to reliable accounts, the Taliban mercenaries — heavily reinforced from outside very recently — have been preparing a massive attack against northern Afghanistan to take place in the next few days. The mobilization of forces reaching Kabul is still continuing. Thousands of militia members from outside, whose identity and nationality have been well explained in previous communications addressed to the President of the Security Council and to the Secretary-General, are part of the mobilization. The Council may recall the involvement of "foreign military personnel" in the Afghan conflict, which was identified as inadmissible in resolution 1076 (1996) of 22 October 1996, as well as in General Assembly resolution 51/195 B of 17 December 1996.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan wishes to request the Security Council to take appropriate preventive measures to halt the onslaught which otherwise, apart from causing a social catastrophe, will negatively affect the peace process.

We have always emphasized the need for the existence of a positive regional atmosphere as an important factor for the cessation of the current crisis in Afghanistan. This desire of ours has been well received by all our neighbouring States except one. We are still waiting to see a change in the stance and attitude of this neighbour towards cooperation, understanding and participation in all common efforts, including peace initiatives.

We are certain that the nation of Pakistan supports non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and favours friendship and brotherhood with the Afghan nation. When Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif gained the majority vote in the Pakistani elections, our hopes were further strengthened that he would abandon the stance of the former Pakistani Administration and shift the Pakistani position onto the path of fraternity, good-neighbourliness and mutual respect. His promise on a reconsideration of the Pakistani policy towards Afghanistan is in essence indicative of his approval of the Pakistani constituency's preference for friendship, mutual respect and brotherhood. We hope that fulfilment of that promise will assist us in the peace process and curtail the flow of arms and assistance to a group in Afghanistan that wants to impose draconian military rule.

A cessation of cross-border assistance to the Taliban would be a first step towards the realization of reconciliation, peace and stability in our country. If there is any country that fancies that it will be spared the ramifications of the flames of war and violence fuelled by the Taliban, let us remind it that it needs to do some deep thinking.

Permit me to refer to another factor which has bearing on the current Afghan situation: the gas and oil pipeline project referred to by the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of 10 April 1997 as a new Central Asian version of the nineteenth-century Great Game.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan is well aware of the outstanding economic significance of the projected gas and oil pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan, and probably India, through the territory of Afghanistan. The significance attached to this project by some industrialized countries and the interest taken by major corporations in the construction of the pipeline have come to represent a classic political game and a struggle for the control of the ancient Silk Road, thus signifying a race for securing energy pipelines. This competition is undoubtedly about to create major political ramifications, jeopardizing regional peace and stability.

We appreciate this historic opportunity. We are ready to reap the benefits of the project, but only if it serves the supreme interests of Afghanistan. But we cannot afford to be part of a political game, because we have suffered enough. What we need is peace. Our salvation depends on our national unity. To achieve that, we need national reconciliation. Construction of the pipeline project should complement peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and aim at extinguishing the flames of war rather than at fuelling them. Continued war and violence in Afghanistan would only delay not only the construction of the pipeline project but also the reconstruction and rehabilitation of our war-shattered homeland.

As stated during the gatherings of the Economic Cooperation Organization, and also as communicated to the Unocal-Delta Consortium and Bridas — the two leading competing corporations for the project — and in compliance with the memorandum of understanding signed by Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan at the fourth summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization held in Ashgabat in May 1996, Afghanistan believes that the construction of this project may best be done through a consortium representing all interested multinational corporations. Otherwise, we would be ready to negotiate with a company that will not tie the project to any political conditions and would be ready to take preliminary practical steps for the project's implementation.

We believe that with a view to the achievement of a durable political settlement in Afghanistan and to the alleviation of regional and international concern at the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan, the Security Council will appreciate all of the harsh and complex realities in our country. The Islamic State of Afghanistan actively cooperates with the Head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and will positively consider any peace plan that is in conformity with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

A military solution in Afghanistan would be a serious threat to the peace and security of the region. As

clearly indicated in paragraph 7 of the report of the Secretary-General dated 16 March 1997,

> "The Taliban, judging both from their words and from their activities on the ground, appear determined to gain military and political control of the whole of Afghanistan and to establish their" — and I emphasize "their" — "vision of an Islamic State. They view the other side as opposed to this goal." (*S/1997/240, para. 7*)

We earnestly believe that the Security Council should take appropriate measures, including sanctions against the Taliban and their supporters, who are supplying arms and logistical support and are preaching an appeasement policy towards the Taliban.

Armed popular opposition, including mass civil unrest against the Taliban, is continuing to increase. Many districts in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Laghman and the north-western province of Badghis have very recently been liberated with the assistance of the Supreme Council for the Defence of Afghanistan.

All that I have stated is not to justify the Islamic State of Afghanistan as the only Power capable of bringing peace to the entire country, although the foundations of the Government have broadened considerably, to include the Eastern Council of Nangarhar. Rather it is to emphasize the serious ramifications of the continuation of assistance being channeled to the Taliban, which poses a threat to democracy, human rights and peace and stability — not only in Afghanistan but in the entire region.

Having fervently stood by the ideals of the United Nations, the Islamic State of Afghanistan, despite incalculable odds, has struggled for the preservation of the national independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, and continues to do so. While we believe there is no military solution to our country's multifaceted problems, the Islamic State of Afghanistan has no viable option other than to resist the Taliban's agenda. Just a few years ago, we halted a Soviet thrust southward, so that part of the world would be safer. Today we are striving to contain the Taliban within Afghanistan, because we are committed to regional and global peace and stability. Yet we still hold the conviction that the return of peace and stability to Afghanistan requires a national accord reached between all sides. This can only be achieved through serious negotiations, for which the Islamic State of Afghanistan has always expressed its readiness. Today, we are still ready.

The President: I thank the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): It is a pleasure for me to welcome the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Mr. Ghafoorzai, to this Chamber today.

Although a month has already passed since the Secretary-General submitted his report on Afghanistan to the Security Council and to the General Assembly, the situation in that country continues to retain its alarming momentum. The military situation is deteriorating, and efforts towards a political settlement are at a standstill. Human rights violations continue, in particular discrimination against women. Afghanistan remains a source of the illegal spread of drugs and of international terrorism. Thus, the situation in that country continues to represent a threat to international peace and security in the region, and is fraught with the danger of a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe.

Russia is deeply concerned over this course of events. Unfortunately, the warring factions in Afghanistan have not heeded numerous appeals, *inter alia* from the Security Council and the General Assembly, regarding the need to renounce attempts to resolve the conflict by military means.

We are particularly alarmed by the fact that the Taliban movement continues to try to press ahead with its military effort. Moreover, as is well known, because of the Taliban position, there has been absolutely no result from the meetings of the Intra-Afghan Working Group, held under the auspices of the United Nations Special Mission. After those meetings, the Head of the Special Mission, Mr. Holl, undertook efforts to convene a political meeting of the Afghan parties, but these too have so far yielded no results.

We call upon all of the Afghan parties — and first and foremost the Taliban movement — to implement United Nations decisions, to cooperate fully with the United Nations Special Mission and to embark seriously on the path of negotiations. Only thus, and not through a build-up of military pressure, will it be possible to achieve a lasting peace in Afghanistan. A solution to the problem of achieving national reconciliation and a stable political settlement to this conflict, which has gone on for many years, is possible through the establishment of a fully representative and broad-based transitional

government. For this purpose, the Afghan parties must immediately cease hostilities, renounce the use of force and put aside their differences in the name of the higher interest of the Afghan people.

The Russian Federation fully supports the activities of the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan, headed by Mr. Holl, and is ready to continue to render the necessary assistance. The United Nations must play a central role in Afghan affairs, *inter alia* in ensuring the proper coordination of international efforts aimed at supporting a settlement and in exerting pressure on the Afghan parties. We believe indeed that the United Nations, and in particular the Special Mission, has every opportunity to enhance its role.

It is difficult to agree with the assertion that the dreadful conflict in Afghanistan seems somehow to have remained on the sidelines of the Security Council's attention. In our view, in carrying out its functions under the Charter, the Council must continue constantly to follow the development of the situation in Afghanistan and to react adequately to it through the adoption of appropriate measures. The Council's previous decisions contain a good basis for searching for means to settle the conflict. These decisions must be implemented. One of these is that supplying weapons to the warring factions and rendering them other types of military and technical assistance must cease.

States with an influence on Afghan affairs must make every effort to move the situation to political channels. We hope that the meeting to be convened by the Secretary-General, the second meeting of concerned countries on Afghanistan, will provide an additional impetus for reaching agreement on approaches to an Afghan settlement.

The complex humanitarian situation also requires further measures to ease the suffering of the Afghan people. We are deeply convinced that humanitarian assistance must not be used as a bargaining chip in this struggle among the factions to win over to their side the population of one or another region of the country. We believe it is important that humanitarian organizations should render assistance to all those who are in need, throughout the entire territory of Afghanistan.

The Russian Federation is making maximum efforts to promote the cause of a settlement in Afghanistan. In close consultations with its Central Asian partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — Kazakstan, Kyrgyztan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — Russia is carefully following the situation and is taking steps aimed at promoting political dialogue and preventing the Afghan crisis from having a negative impact on the entire region of Central Asia.

At the same time, we are maintaining our useful and extremely productive contacts on Afghanistan with other States of the region, in particular India, Iran and Pakistan. We believe that the coordinated efforts of all concerned States will help in reaching a formula acceptable to all for a settlement in Afghanistan.

The Russian delegation believes that the Security Council will be dealing with Afghan issues in the future. We believe that, following the results of today's discussion of the situation in Afghanistan, it will be necessary for the Security Council to adopt a presidential statement, that once again clearly reaffirms the basic approach of the United Nations to a settlement in Afghanistan.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Security Council has convened this formal meeting to discuss the question of Afghanistan, which clearly shows the importance the international community attaches to this question. We sincerely hope that today's open debate will be conducive to a peaceful settlement of the Afghan question.

The rivalries between the Afghan factions, and the long drawn-out strife, have brought perpetual turmoil and misery to the Afghan people. The Afghan conflict has led to instability in the region. As a close neighbour of Afghanistan, China wishes to express its profound concern and disquiet. The Chinese Government believes that the achievement of national reconciliation is the key to a just and lasting settlement of the Afghan question. The final settlement of this question depends, fundamentally, on the Afghan people themselves. It follows that, first, all sides concerned should show the sincere political will to settle their differences through peaceful negotiation. Secondly, the parties concerned should immediately implement a ceasefire and cease all hostilities. In our view, the attempt to use military means to settle the conflict will only aggravate the conflict, plunging the Afghan people into dire misery indefinitely.

This problem has many complex causes. We urge all sides to take account of the fundamental interests of the Afghan people, bury the hatchet, set aside their political and religious differences and engage in serious

negotiations so as to establish as early as possible a stable, broad-based government acceptable to all sides.

We appreciate and support the good offices of the Secretary-General and his special representative in seeking a political settlement of this question. We hope that the United Nations can continue to play a central, leading role in this field. At the same time, we have also noted the political and diplomatic efforts of the countries concerned in the region to give impetus to the settlement of this question, and we welcome those efforts. We hope that, through the joint efforts of the international community, favourable conditions can be created for the settlement of this question. We look forward to the day when there will be a comprehensive and political settlement to the Afghan question.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Egypt to the Secretary-General for his most recent report, presented to both the General Assembly and the Security Council, on developments in the situation in Afghanistan over the past three months. I should also like to express our appreciation for the sincere efforts being made by the special representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Norbert Holl, which are aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement. It gives me pleasure to welcome His Excellency the Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, to whose statement we listened with great care.

The Security Council's convening of a meeting today to consider the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan clearly reflects the profound and continued concern of the international community over the tension and instability that Afghanistan is experiencing for the seventeenth consecutive year. That situation has exhausted the Afghan people, devastated its capabilities and depleted its resources. It has become a source of tension and concern not only for the Central Asian region, but for numerous other regions of the world, which are suffering from the negative repercussions of the Afghan crisis. Such repercussions have taken the form of terrorist activities, carried out by extremists of various nationalities trained in Afghanistan. In this regard, I should like to refer to reports on the reopening of two camps for training terrorists in a city in southern Afghanistan, as well as to press reports confirming the presence of some of the individuals who lead and finance terrorist movements in various countries.

The continued preference of some of the warring Afghan parties for the military option, and their intransigence and lack of responsiveness to the strenuous efforts of the special representative to achieve a comprehensive settlement, confirm the need to develop the efforts currently being made by the United Nations and to direct these efforts to more practical steps leading to the creation of the climate necessary for the implementation of the proposals made to date and of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council on this subject.

The report of the Secretary-General contains a reference to regional meetings held in an attempt to achieve a solution to this crisis. The report refers to the efforts of the Special Mission, which led to meetings of the Intra-Afghan Working Group from 13 to 15 January and 24 to 26 February in Islamabad, during which several questions were discussed, including the ceasefire, the exchange of the prisoners of war and other confidence-building measures. Egypt believes that there is a great need for the coordination of all efforts made by the parties concerned under the supervision of the United Nations Special Mission, as well as the expansion of these efforts to include the ceasefire and other measures that have been discussed. Such coordination would undoubtedly lead to the success of these efforts. In this regard, the elements that were discussed in the meetings of the Working Group could serve as the nucleus of the beginning of serious dialogue between the Afghan parties under the supervision of the United Nations.

The proposal made by the Secretary-General in his report to consider the holding of a meeting of the warring Afghan parties outside Afghanistan under the supervision of the United Nations, and with the cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other organizations concerned, clearly constitutes basis for future action. We hope that all outside parties concerned with the problem of Afghanistan will support such a plan. We also hope that the Secretary-General will, at the earliest opportunity, provide a clear outline of this plan in the light of his consultations with all the States concerned that have influence in Afghanistan.

At another level, the Non-Aligned Movement expressed its concern over the Afghan problem in the final communiqué of the ministerial meeting held at New Delhi earlier this month and expressed the need for the Afghan parties to move towards national reconciliation, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. This concern of the non-aligned countries — in addition to the increasing concern of the States members of the European Union and its

communiqués on this subject, and the concern evinced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — will give the necessary impetus for a comprehensive movement supported by all the members of the international community.

On 9 April last year the delegation of Egypt pointed out that the form of the proposed settlement is not the real cause of the continuation of the current crisis. The essence of the crisis is the lack of political will for peace on the part of some parties. At that time, we reaffirmed that the way out of this dark tunnel was through the mobilization of political will on three levels: first, the political will for peace on the part of the Afghan parties themselves, some of which seem, as has been indicated in various reports of the Secretary-General, still to prefer a military option; secondly, the reaffirmation of the cessation of all outside military assistance to the parties to the conflict as the point of departure for any tangible efforts made by the United Nations; and, thirdly, the political will of the international community itself. Since the end of last year, the international community has seemed ready to refocus on the situation in Afghanistan. This has been seen in, among other things, the formation of the group of interested countries and countries with influence in Afghanistan, which held its first meeting last November upon the initiative of Mr. Boutros-Ghali, the former Secretary-General of the Organization. We hope that this group will be given the opportunity to discharge its necessary role.

What is necessary at this time is to highlight the question of Afghanistan among the priorities of the work of the United Nations, to give new momentum to the political will of the Afghan parties and the countries with influence and to direct them towards the establishment of peace in Afghanistan.

Among the matters causing grave alarm are the negative repercussions of the tense situation in Afghanistan on the Afghan citizens, whose suffering continues as a result of the absence of peace in their country. The continued dangers of landmines, the dire nutritional situation, and the growing problems of refugees and displaced persons make a prompt settlement all the more urgent.

All the rehabilitation activities carried out by the United Nations in Afghanistan, the important and tangible results of which started to appear after the consolidated appeal made by the Secretary-General, which was followed by the meeting at Ashgabat for assistance to Afghanistan, constitute but a tiny fraction of the massive volume of assistance needed by Afghanistan. The infrastructure is in dire need of continued rehabilitation plans supported by the international community.

In this regard, the delegation of Egypt would like to reaffirm the importance of striking a balance and establishing a link between the political side and the economic side in the process of reaching a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. A link between those two aspects constitutes one of the practical ways to encourage or, if need be, deter the Afghan parties, linking economic assistance to the degree of flexibility shown by each party to the conflict in efforts for a political settlement.

Finally, the delegation of Egypt would like to reaffirm that this open debate could promote a political settlement of the question of Afghanistan. However, this will require the beginning of a wide-based political dialogue through which national reconciliation can be achieved in a manner that will ensure the preservation of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan; promote the efforts for development, rehabilitation and reconstruction; contribute to the prompt return of refugees and displaced persons to their countries; and achieve security and well-being for the fraternal people of Afghanistan.

Sir John Weston (United Kingdom): This Council last discussed the disturbing situation in Afghanistan in a formal meeting on 16 October last year. It is useful that we should do so again, particularly while we are able to take advantage of the presence of Mr. Holl, the Head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, here in New York.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned at the continued fighting in Afghanistan and at the suffering of its people. We hope that spring will prove to be the season for a peace offensive, not a military offensive. The continued search for peace remains vital.

At the forefront of this search are Mr. Holl and the United Nations Special Mission. The United Nations Special Mission deserves the full support of this Council and all Member States. General Assembly resolution 51/195 described the United Nations as a universally recognized intermediary and set out its central and impartial role in seeking a peaceful solution. We fully endorse this description.

Among their other achievements, we particularly applaud the success of Mr. Holl and the United Nations

Special Mission in getting the Afghan parties together in Islamabad on two occasions in recent weeks. It is essential that the Special Mission be afforded every assistance in building on these contacts. It must be able to benefit from the influence of States in the region over different factions. We hope that the United Nations Special Mission's contacts with these States will intensify, as foreseen by General Assembly resolution 50/88. All States should give their full backing to the United Nations Special Mission and refrain from parallel initiatives which could cut across its efforts.

We are concerned that the parties continue to receive arms from outside, despite the clear call in Security Council resolution 1076 (1996) for this to stop. The European Union has adopted an embargo on arms sales to Afghanistan, which has been supported by associate countries. Other countries should adopt a similar position of restraint.

There can be no military solution which offers lasting peace in Afghanistan. We hope that the factions will learn this lesson without inflicting another round of fighting on the long-suffering Afghan people. The United Nations Special Mission's priority must be the negotiation of an immediate ceasefire. It must also continue to work for a settlement which offers a fully representative, broad-based transitional government and preserves the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. Peace cannot be lasting if the country is riven by ethnic divisions. All factions must be open to working together with others and to respecting the rights of different faiths and different ethnic groups.

United Nations agencies can also discuss practical measures with the factions which can improve Afghanistan's future. The factions need to have a better understanding of the costs of war, the benefits of peace and the need for Afghanistan to play a constructive role in restoring stability to the region. These issues include health, demining, return of refugees and economic reconstruction.

A particular priority is rooting out the criminal drug culture which pervades Afghanistan and has an invidious effect beyond Afghanistan's borders. The factions are committed to working with the international community to tackle this problem. We expect those commitments to be honoured. For its part, the United Kingdom has donated £900,000 to the United Nations Drug Control Programme to combat drugs in Afghanistan, conditional upon the parties cooperating fully with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, and we have pledged a further £1 million.

The United Kingdom remains one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. It donated £7 million in 1996-1997. We will continue to work with other donors to ensure that aid reaches all Afghans, regardless of gender and consistent with the approach of Security Council resolution 1076 (1996), which denounces discrimination against women and girls. We were glad to participate in the donors' meeting in Ashgabat in January, which reaffirmed this approach. We would encourage all agencies working in Afghanistan to continue to work to a single set of opportunity criteria in this respect.

The meeting also agreed upon arrangements for improved United Nations coordination of humanitarian aid. These now need to be implemented in full. It also makes sense for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to work closely together. They share a common desire for peace in Afghanistan, and they should exploit the synergies between the aid effort and the political process.

We applaud the work of the humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan. They are working tirelessly, often in dangerous circumstances, to help the victims of the conflict. The factions should respect the aid agencies, which are there are to help the Afghan people.

The people of Afghanistan have suffered for too long. The international community should send a clear message that they want this spring to be a season of peace, not further fighting and misery. The United Nations Special Mission should intensify its efforts to find a solution. Its success depends on all States offering their full support, cutting off external support to the factions and continuing to provide aid to the people. We call on all States to do just that.

Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) (*interpretation from French*): For many years, Afghanistan has continuously and disturbingly been in the foreground of the international stage. As control of Afghanistan, we are told, is one of the keys to some hegemonic stratagems, both old and new, this country has always been coveted. However, and despite the vicissitudes of time and a gamut of trials, Afghanistan tried to re-establish its place in the world after having achieved independence — after its liberation, I should say — in 1919.

After the adoption in 1964 of a constitution that recognized the separation of political, legislative and

judicial powers, there was relative stability, which opened the way to the full enjoyment by Afghan citizens of both genders of their civic, political and economic rights. Unfortunately, that period was not to last, being abruptly interrupted by a military *coup d'état* in 1973. Afghanistan thus once again became a linchpin in the war of influence among the countries of the region and hence a pawn of global politics. The satellitization of the country in 1979 further exacerbated East-West rivalries and fanned tension caused by the cold war. The evolution of the events which have continuously overwhelmed the Afghan people is too well known for us to dwell further on it, except to express the concern of Guinea-Bissau at a worsening situation.

The successive reports of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan suffice to demonstrate that, despite United Nations efforts, the crisis remains severe. The Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, have all tried by means of many resolutions to chart the course to be followed in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. It has not yet been possible to achieve the negotiated solution for which the international community has advocated for many years. War continues because to date the factions have been unable to reach an understanding amongst themselves, which, unfortunately, has led to continued fighting and to the complete ruin of the country.

Today the Security Council is meeting at a crucial moment in the history of Afghanistan. The reports from this country are very troubling. Violence continues to claim many victims among the civilian population. In Afghanistan, a people is in the throes of a war in which adversaries do not hesitate to use vile methods to achieve their purposes.

We are duty-bound to act and to unite our efforts, because the persistence of this conflict is also affecting neighbouring countries, where hundreds of thousands of unfortunate people have sought refuge, and it is imperilling peace in this part of the world. This is why our delegation considers that we must spare nothing that might lead to a cessation of hostilities and to a ceasefire — of which the demilitarization of Kabul would be a major element.

In this connection we are pleased to note the special attention that the Secretary-General himself is giving to the conflict. We support all of his initiatives to find a lasting solution. We are gratified by the progress that has been made by the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan, whose staff deserves our admiration, thanks and support, in the light of the many risks that these people daily confront in carrying out their noble work.

To be useful, the discussion in the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan must provide a framework for dialogue which takes into account the stakes involved for each of the parties, as well as the opinions of all of them. It should encourage the articulation of a collective approach — the only means of achieving peace.

The international community, and the countries in the region in particular, must do their utmost to convince the Afghan factions that it is necessary to stop fighting and to commit themselves to negotiations without further delay. The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, by exercising a stabilizing influence on the protagonists, can and must play a decisive role in the restoration of peace.

There can be no acceptable military solution, because for peace to be lasting, it must be based on national reconciliation and on the right of all factions to participate in forming a government which represents all the components of the Afghan population in its full multi-ethnic diversity.

The leaders of the Afghan factions must take their inspiration from the universal principles of democracy and promote the creation of new political, social and economic structures which will respect ethnic and demographic balance and the equality of citizens and genders. These conditions are necessary to ensure the full flowering of their people and the harmonious development of their country.

The international community would find it difficult to accept the imposition of discriminatory laws on Afghan girls and women, refusing them, in particular, the right to education and to equal pay for their work, in violation of the most elementary rights universally recognized as belonging to every human being. Nor could we accept Afghanistan becoming a breeding-ground for international terrorism or a centre for the illicit international drug trade.

Afghanistan, a country whose history and culture go back five thousand years, cannot slip into the practices of an earlier age, practices which run counter to the precepts of Islam, in which tolerance and respect for others are high priorities. This country — which provided the chosen pass for the old Silk Road and whose fabulous mountains have witnessed some of the greatest figures of history: Darius I, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan,

just to mention a few — cannot sink into obscurantism, rejecting all ideas of progress or of belonging to a modern and independent world.

Afghanistan deserves to resume its rightful place in the concert of nations. My delegation is pleased that the Secretary-General has called for the convening of a second meeting, on 16 April, to bring together the countries concerned about the Afghan crisis. We hope that the participants in that meeting will be able to study all the ways to promote intra-Afghan discussions in order to put an end to the hostilities, as well as ways of implementing the recommendations of the International Forum on Assistance to Afghanistan held last January at Ashgabat.

In conclusion, the situation in Afghanistan remains of concern to the international community as a whole. The United Nations must continue to play its central and irreplaceable role in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict, because we obviously cannot accept the feasibility of a military option. The Security Council must take steps to that end by ensuring that all the parties involved will fully participate in negotiations on national reconciliation and the formation of a broadly representative Government. In this connection, the countries of the region should be encouraged to do their utmost to halt the flow of weapons to Afghanistan and be called upon to cooperate with the United Nations Special Mission and to refrain from any interference that might impede rapprochement between the factions. The Afghan leaders, for their part, must commit themselves before the international community to halting drug trafficking and to ensuring that their country does not spawn international terrorism. It is our duty to guarantee the security of the personnel of humanitarian organizations and to make sure that no barriers prevent those men and women from delivering the necessary humanitarian assistance to the needy populations. Girls and women in Afghanistan must not be subjected to discriminatory laws, which, as we have already stated, violate their fundamental rights and contribute to delaying economic and social progress in the country.

Guinea-Bissau hopes that the Security Council will take into account the opinions expressed by all delegations in the debate on the question of Afghanistan and will give clear expression to an agreed position that will promote the building of peace in that country, whose population has suffered all too much and deserves our continued attention and all the humanitarian assistance it requires.

Mr. Dejammet (France) (*interpretation from French*): The Security Council, in resolution 1076 (1996), and the General Assembly, in resolution 51/195, expressed the fundamental principles for a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan: the Afghan parties must put an end to hostilities and engage in political dialogue; foreign interference, in particular in the form of supplying weapons, must cease; and the United Nations has a central role to play in the settlement of the conflict, first and foremost, through the action of the Special Mission to Afghanistan.

The latest report of the Secretary-General refers to the tireless efforts of the United Nations Special Mission to achieve a ceasefire. It also points out that humanitarian assistance has continued in often difficult conditions. We must pay tribute to these efforts, and France, in this context, would like to thank all those who assisted us in the release of the two French representatives of a non-governmental organization who were imprisoned in Kabul for a month.

The situation described by the Secretary-General shows, however, that little progress has been made in the implementation of the principles expressed in the resolutions of the United Nations. We note, as does the Secretary-General, that the warring factions have not heeded the repeated appeals for peace and appear determined to pursue the military option. The Secretary-General indicates that it is widely believed that foreign interference is continuing. The humanitarian situation is characterized by persistent discrimination against women, displacement of populations and mistreatment of the personnel of humanitarian organizations.

This situation should not lead to discouragement or indifference. The new initiatives announced by the Secretary-General deserve our support. In particular, we welcome with satisfaction the convening of a new meeting of concerned countries, and we are in favour of holding such meetings more regularly. In addition, we support the idea of greater involvement by the Security Council.

We reaffirm our full support for the efforts of the special representative of the Secretary-General aimed at a resumption of dialogue. We hope that the special representative will be able to extend his contacts to influential individuals in Afghanistan and influential Afghans abroad. Mr. Holl's regular and close contacts with all of the States that have influence, first and foremost the States of the region, will also be extremely useful. Cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference should also finally bear fruit.

The action of the Secretary-General and his special representative, however, can only yield results if all Member States adopt an attitude consistent with the principles expressed by the United Nations.

We share the wish expressed by the Secretary-General to see States interested in Afghanistan, and that have an influence on that country, coordinate their activities with those of the Special Mission and not favour any of the parties to the detriment of another.

The cessation of interference is indispensable, in particular the supply of weapons. Those States that interfere in this way bear particular responsibility for the continuation of this conflict. I wish to recall that France, like its partners in the European Union, is applying a full embargo on the supply of weapons.

The continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan has prolonged the suffering of the Afghan people. This conflict may result in the destabilization of the region, and it also has adverse consequences for the entire international community. We need only recall in this regard that many terrorists, including some of the most dangerous ones, are at this very moment sheltered in Afghanistan.

A settlement of this conflict can therefore be possible only if the Afghan parties agree to cease hostilities and engage in dialogue. We must reiterate our appeals along these lines. Let us see to it that the Afghan parties fully understand that these appeals reflect the unanimous will of the international community and therefore of the Security Council.

Mr. Matuszewski (Poland): As my delegation associates itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union, I will take the liberty of emphasizing only certain elements of my country's position with regard to the situation in Afghanistan.

The delegation of Poland continues to hold the view that the Afghan crisis constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security and, in particular, to stability in the region of Central Asia. The perennial lack of normalization in Afghanistan is the source of tensions which persist around its perimeter. The continuation by the warring parties of their attempts to resolve the conflict by military means only perpetuates the present ordeal and aggravates the catastrophic humanitarian situation of the civilian population in Afghanistan. It may ultimately threaten the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Afghanistan, with all the ensuing consequences for the whole region.

As on previous occasions, the Polish delegation expresses its strong belief that only genuine national reconciliation and respect for the interests of all ethnic and religious population groups in Afghanistan, as well as the long-standing tradition of Afghan statehood, can provide a true basis for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The warring factions in Afghanistan should finally acknowledge the fact that their country is the common heritage of all Afghans and that the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan can be enhanced only through the participation of all ethnic groups and political factions in the affairs of the country.

We reaffirm our view that the parties concerned throughout Afghanistan should respect the human rights of their people and should demonstrate tolerance and moderation in the exercise of control, in all its dimensions, over the various parts of the Afghan territory. Humanitarian problems and human rights abuses resulting from the protracted armed struggle among the parties constitute an additional destabilizing factor in the overall situation in Afghanistan. Persistent unrest and upheavals in Afghanistan bring about the continual displacement of an increasing number of people in various areas of the country. The deterioration of the social and economic status of women in Afghanistan, in particular with regard to their restricted access to education and employment, which contravenes the provisions of relevant international instruments, remains a source of deep concern.

A political settlement and peace in Afghanistan can have real impact on the humanitarian situation of civilians, who bear the brunt of the conflict, as well as on the results of the humanitarian work undertaken by aid agencies. It is commendable that, in spite of continued instability and ongoing hostilities, humanitarian activities are being carried out by United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations throughout Afghanistan. It is also encouraging that as a follow-up to the International Forum on Assistance to Afghanistan, convened in January 1997 at Ashgabat, efforts are currently under way to develop a strategic framework which will address immediate relief as well as the longer-term rehabilitation and development needs of Afghanistan. Yet it must be stressed again that the cessation of armed hostilities and political stability in Afghanistan are indispensable if reconstruction measures are to have a lasting effect.

The Polish delegation is still of the opinion that the United Nations has an important role to play in bringing about the end of the civil war in Afghanistan and in achieving a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. In our view, the fundamental role of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan in assisting the Afghan parties to negotiate a broad-based settlement cannot be overestimated. We fully support the diplomatic efforts of Mr. Norbert Holl, the special representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, to bring the parties together to negotiate a cease-fire and initiate genuine political dialogue leading to the creation of a fully representative mechanism for national reconciliation. We are also encouraged that the great majority of Afghans want the United Nations to play a central role in the search for a peaceful solution.

Unfortunately, in recent months, just as before, the United Nations peace effort has been making little progress, as the Afghan warring factions have remained intransigent and have not heeded the repeated appeals for a negotiated settlement, continuously pursuing military options without regard for the suffering of the civilian population.

The military situation remains precariously volatile and, according to the Secretary-General's latest report on Afghanistan (S/1997/240), it may soon deteriorate further with the onset of the spring thaw. In view of the grave consequences of a possible intensification of military confrontation, the Polish delegation shares the view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report that it is necessary to increase and coordinate international efforts to impress upon the Afghan parties the need to solve the conflict in a peaceful way, that is to arrive at a lasting political settlement with the participation of all segments of Afghan society.

It must be reaffirmed today that, without the political will of the parties, an end to the Afghan civil war and the implementation of a comprehensive peaceful settlement as outlined in relevant United Nations resolutions, will remain unattainable.

The Polish delegation is seriously concerned at the prospect of continuing military hostilities in Afghanistan. We reaffirm our conviction that the cessation of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan through the supply of arms and military equipment to the warring factions is one of the principal conditions of a resolution of the armed conflict in that country.

We are of the view that the international community should persist in expressing its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan. This sentiment was reflected in the last Security Council resolution on Afghanistan and it also needs to be reaffirmed today.

Allow me reiterate our position on the necessity for a negotiated settlement of the Afghan crisis. We underline the importance of implementing the principles enunciated in the relevant United Nations resolutions in this regard, bearing in mind the right of the Afghan people to determine their own destiny.

In conclusion, we wish to call upon all States, and especially those with influence in the region, to assist the people of Afghanistan in searching for a peaceful future for their country in coordination with the activities of the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan.

Mr. Somavía (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): We would like today to express our appreciation and full support for the active work carried out in recent months by the Head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, Mr. Norbert Holl, and by his entire team representing the Secretary-General. They have the difficult and complex task of trying to turn the international community's aspirations for peace into concrete fact on the ground. We congratulate them on their determination and we understand the obstacles they face.

My delegation attaches great importance to the series of meetings of the Intra-Afghan Working Group, in which representatives of the Taliban and the Supreme Council for the Defence of Afghanistan participated for the first time. We think that it is necessary that a concrete plan should be established as soon as possible as a result of these meetings to allow for the formation of a broad-based government in which all sectors are represented.

Similarly, the meeting at which broad consultations were held among some interested States by the Secretary-General at Headquarters last November was another important event. We consider it to be very positive that such consultations will continue at the meeting scheduled for this week.

We would also like to reiterate our belief that it is only through negotiations and political dialogue that a lasting solution can be found to this long-running conflict.

Agreement on a lasting cease-fire is essential as an immediate preliminary task in order to create conditions which will make it possible for there to be progress in the peace negotiations. However, this is not happening. The leaders are not agreeing. It is always painful to note the indifference of leaders at the suffering of their own followers and the peoples that they claim to represent in the conflicts before the Security Council. We are again encountering this situation in Afghanistan. The conflict continues and is deepening, to the cost of the most unprotected. It is always the leaders who suffer the least. It is always the leaders who escape shortages. Hardly ever are their lives at risk.

This Council and the Secretary-General's team have made wise proposals that provide a foundation for a peaceful political solution to the conflict. We urge the leaders to move ahead in this direction.

Those who continue to prefer a military solution to the conflict are deceiving themselves, and this will do nothing but prolong the suffering of their own people. Worse yet, it would appear that the parties are getting ready to resume armed operations of greater magnitude once the winter snows have melted. They are preparing for a violent spring. We, like others, would like to see a springtime of peace.

However, this recourse to arms is occurring in part because the international community, despite all its speeches and treaties, continues to recognize the use of force as a source of international legitimacy. For example, and very sadly, it would not seem strange to anyone that if one of the factions were finally able to prevail by force and conquer all Afghan territory, its delegate would then represent Afghanistan at the United Nations.

If this is contemporary political reality, it should come as no surprise that the factions are reluctant to negotiate and seek peaceful solutions. They all know that military victory would be more advantageous domestically than a negotiated peace. Today, either solution is equally acceptable to the international community. There is no incentive from the international community to choose a political solution over one imposed by force.

This being the case, a military victory makes it easier to consolidate domestic power and cause no loss of international recognition. The current state of law and international relations seems, therefore, to be either an implicit or an indirect stimulus to solutions by force, except for the possible use of sanctions, the effectiveness of which is very questionable.

This perverse logic results, moreover, in increased internationalization of conflicts, because in today's world no faction gets involved in a civil war without external support. This is certainly the situation in Afghanistan.

We are sorry to have to reiterate today the concerns that were already expressed by my delegation on previous occasions in connection with continued foreign interference in internal Afghan affairs. We hope that in the future this reality will not impede the negotiating process and will not make it more difficult for the good offices and constructive dialogue encouraged by the United Nations to be successful.

The supply of arms to the factions and the utilization of Afghan territory for illicit activities such as terrorism and drug trafficking are very negative manifestations of such interference. This situation points up the urgency of putting an end to interference. We appeal to all the countries involved to cooperate with the United Nations to ensure that the Afghan crisis will not spread and threaten stability in the region.

While we firmly encourage the continuation of political activities aimed at achieving peace, we cannot hide our concern about the humanitarian problems that still persist. We reiterate the objections that we have raised about the trampling of human rights, whether they be caused by the Taliban or by any other Afghan group. Nothing justifies the restrictions on the access of women to education and employment. We also encourage the factions to take measures without delay that will make it possible for refugees and displaced persons to return to their communities of origin. We know very well that respect for the various ethnic and religious groups is an indispensable basis for peace.

Allow me to address specifically the situation of women, and particularly in the territories occupied by the Taliban. First and foremost, I wish to point out that this is not merely an obsession of some sectors of the Western press. It is a real and deep concern of a significant number of Member States of the United Nations, as was clearly demonstrated in last week's discussions in the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The same holds for many sectors of civil society.

For his part, Mr. Choong Hyun Paik, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Afghanistan, reported to the Commission on Human Rights that the Taliban policy has resulted in serious violations of human rights, particularly those of women, who have been prohibited from working or attending school. The Special Rapporteur has reported that they have been severely beaten with various objects, such as car antennas, chains and hoses, for not complying with the dress code that has been imposed.

Paragraph 73 of the Special Rapporteur's report indicates that prohibition against women working has had a significant impact on the work of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations that employ a large number of women. He draws attention in paragraph 82 of his report to the feminization of poverty, which results from the current marginalization of women.

Those of us who do not profess the Islamic faith, but have great respect for it, cannot understand how this deplorable treatment of women can be justified by religious reasons. There are many Muslim countries that follow different policies. We should also like to emphasize that there is an international system for protection of human rights, which must be respected. The 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights made it clear that the rights of women are human rights. Accordingly, we would like these practices to be re-examined.

The Government of Chile considers that the recommendations to overcome this situation contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur should be put into practice, particularly the appeal for the United Nations to speak with one unified voice on all questions of gender equality.

But why am I talking at such great length about women in a Security Council debate? Because Chile and many other countries in the world do not want to see the rights of women sacrificed on the altar of peace. This is what we wish to prevent by calling attention to the matter today. We do not want this Council, or the United Nations, to look the other way if a political agreement is achieved that would allow women to be subjected to the practices that we are condemning today. This is not a matter we consider negotiable for the sake of a political agreement.

Peace is not only the end of hostilities and a stable distribution of political power. Peace is also a society living in peace, where all citizens can enjoy their fundamental human rights and feel safe in their lives, customs and property.

In conclusion, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to the humanitarian-assistance organizations for their valuable work. We would also like firmly to reject and condemn those who have tried to prevent them from doing their work now and in the past.

Finally, we appeal to all the leaders of the Afghan factions to cooperate in good faith pragmatically and flexibly with the Special Mission and to support the initiatives urged by the United Nations to put an end to this fratricidal war and to inaugurate without delay an era of peace and reconstruction for good of their people.

Mr. Choi (Republic of Korea): Afghanistan has been engulfed in internal armed conflict for more than 17 years. Those long years have exacted a heavy toll in innocent civilian casualties and untold human suffering, and have devastated the nation's physical infrastructure. The conflict has been made worse by clashing religious convictions, ethnic divisions and outside interference. Despite strenuous diplomatic efforts, in particular by the Secretary-General and his special representative, Mr. Nobert Holl, to broker a ceasefire and engage the warring parties in a peace process, the fighting has been raging unabated, with even greater intensity in recent months. Peace in Afghanistan remains as elusive as ever.

The Republic of Korea deplores the continuing bloodshed, and calls for an immediate end to the hostilities. The dire humanitarian situation is a matter of grave concern for all of us. We also share deep concern over the ongoing human rights violations attributable to the religious intolerance of the Taliban, including their discrimination against women.

After almost two decades of armed conflict, the Afghan parties must realize that a military solution to their differences is impossible and that there is no alternative to a negotiated political settlement. It is time to spare the Afghan people the misery and suffering that the fighting has brought upon them.

Having said that, my delegation wishes to outline three principles upon which we believe a political settlement of the Afghan conflict should be based.

First, any political settlement of the conflict should involve an immediate ceasefire, the demilitarization of Kabul and the establishment of a broad-based transitional Government of national unity and reconciliation. Secondly, the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Afghanistan, and the inviolability of its borders,

should be fully respected by all States. Outside interference, including the open flow of arms to the parties, undermines peace efforts and only adds to the complexity and intractability of the conflict. We therefore believe that an arms embargo is in order if the peace process is to have any chance of success. Thirdly, the political and military realities on the ground should be duly taken into account in working out a comprehensive political settlement by actively engaging the parties concerned.

We believe that the United Nations and the international community as a whole can do several things to facilitate a settlement on the basis that I have just outlined. While international initiatives to achieve a political settlement of the conflict should be welcomed, particular importance should be attached to the central role and responsibility of the United Nations in trying to achieve a just and lasting settlement. Previous experience has shown that the number of diplomatic initiatives and peace brokers involved in a conflict is not necessarily proportionate to the speed or chances of that conflict's resolution. This is especially true if such additional efforts are not well coordinated with those of the Secretary-General or his special representative. In the case of Afghanistan, impartiality and international credibility are the most badly needed assets in brokering peace, and no other player can compete with the United Nations on this score.

We also attach great importance to the coordination of all activities of United Nations agencies in Afghanistan by the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Afghan warring parties, in particular the Taliban, must be reminded of the need to commit themselves to preventing the areas under their control from being used for the training and sheltering of terrorists. In the same vein, they should also prevent drug trafficking in the territories they control.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the international community's efforts towards a lasting and comprehensive political settlement can succeed only when the Afghan parties themselves demonstrate the political will to resolve their differences through dialogue. The ultimate responsibility for the destiny of Afghanistan lies, after all, in the hands of the Afghan people and their leaders. We earnestly hope that this spring will truly breed lilacs out of the dead land and not bring a new flash of gun barrels.

Mr. Mahugu (Kenya): My delegation takes this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document S/1997/240, dated 16 March 1997, on the worrying situation in Afghanistan, which constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

I would like to begin my remarks today by stating six principles which will guide Kenya's assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. First, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan are paramount. Secondly, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries must be maintained. Thirdly, the peaceful settlement of disputes through negotiation is cherished by all of us. Fourthly, equal rights and equal opportunity for all, including women, must be upheld. Fifthly, the right of the Afghan people to determine their own destiny is a prerequisite that is not only enshrined in international law but also a normal moral and political obligation. Sixthly, the United Nations must continue to play the central role in mediating the conflict and coordinating the peace process.

We are particularly concerned about reports of renewed fighting in Afghanistan, which has caused further significant displacement of civilians, forcing them to live under the most demeaning and intolerable conditions. This upheaval exacerbates an already fragile political and humanitarian situation. We are encouraged that international humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, are mobilizing more resources to cope with this crisis, and we commend their cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent, which now directly helps nearly half a million people throughout Afghanistan. My delegation also strongly supports the appeal for financial and material assistance to ameliorate the effects of the conflict, and encourages donor nations to assist quickly. In addition to the threats to international peace and security, it is this alarm over the precarious humanitarian situation, in particular that of suffering children, which motivated Kenya to support concrete corrective measures initiated by the Security Council. We will continue to support all other efforts geared towards addressing these problems. In this regard, my delegation supports the Non-Aligned Movement's declaration on this subject following the New Delhi meeting, and is ready to work with other delegations to come up with suitable action following the meeting.

We note with apprehension that, as the Taliban are in almost total military control of Afghanistan, they clearly lack an incentive to concede anything in any negotiations. Given their current military advantage, we are not very optimistic that the Taliban will heed calls for a ceasefire and commence meaningful negotiations with the Supreme Council for the Defence of Afghanistan

(SCDA). Indeed, this obvious military advantage has, in the view of my delegation, made it almost impossible for the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to obtain any meaningful concessions from the Taliban or to report substantive progress in negotiations for a ceasefire and the future of Afghanistan. My delegation does not believe that a fresh spring offensive by the Taliban is a gesture of peace or a signal confirming their willingness to discuss the future of the country with anyone else. If anything, it is a clear attempt to solidify their military gains and effectively extend their hegemony throughout the country. This is not the action of an entity willing to negotiate. We think, however, that total military success on their part will not result in a complete political solution of the crisis. Indeed, it will heighten the need for them to sit down and seriously negotiate with the SCDA alliance. We hear encouraging news that General Dostum of the alliance is now ready to meet Mullah Gawooz, the Taliban Minister, and hope that they will do so soon in an appropriate neutral location. We only hope that the impact of a renewed offensive will be softened by the concerted activities of humanitarian agencies.

It is obvious to any student of history that, unfortunately, sustained conflict of this nature is in most cases supported and encouraged from outside. Afghanistan is no different. There are credible reports of continued material and financial support to both the Taliban and the SCDA Alliance; this aggravates the already volatile situation and increases the great need for a resolution of the conflict. To their supporters we say: there are no winners. There have never been winners in such conflicts. We strongly urge all external meddlers to assist in de-escalating the conflict by immediately stopping the reported supply of weapons and military personnel. Indeed, we support the primacy and urgency of this call, as contained also in the Non-Aligned Movement's final declaration on this issue, dated 8 April 1997, in which the Movement's Foreign Ministers

> "called upon all States to strictly refrain from any outside interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, including the involvement of foreign military personnel and the supply of arms to various parties".

Further reports of private oil companies colluding with foreign intelligence agencies on the side of one party to the conflict muddies the water even further. We urge them to stop interfering and to conduct their business in an ethical manner. Nothing can justify such actions, if these are proven to be true.

My delegation is also very concerned about allegations that one of the parties runs terrorist-training camps and that parties to the conflict are involved in the growing and distribution of opium and its derivatives. We think these two evils, drug trafficking and terrorism, are global threats that must be addressed under the auspices of the relevant international instruments designed to combat them, and we urge those involved to refrain from engaging in them.

As the search for peace continues, the role of countries with influence over the parties to the conflict becomes even more important. Being close to the situation, they have better insights into the problem and a detailed understanding of how to proceed. My delegation is therefore encouraged by their unrelenting efforts to arrive at a meaningful solution to the crisis, especially with specific reference to the Istanbul meeting of 5 January, the Tehran meeting of 25 and 26 January and the Tashkent meeting of 24 and 25 February 1997. While the impact of these meetings is not easy to gauge, the primacy and validity of engagement cannot be emphasized enough.

However, we are quite concerned that some of these countries with influence continue supporting one party against the others. This fans the flames of violence, and my delegation strongly supports the Secretary-General's call urging them to refrain from these unhelpful activities. In addition, their efforts need to be coordinated, and this can be done only through the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan.

In this vein and at this juncture, let me on behalf of the Kenya delegation commend Mr. Holl, the Head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, and his team for performing well under difficult circumstances. We are still hopeful that his efforts, spearheaded by the Secretary-General, will eventually bear fruit, and we encourage him to continue vigorously engaging the parties to the conflict. We concur with the Secretary-General's view that a negotiated settlement under the auspices of the United Nations is the only solution to the conflict, and we encourage him to convene an intra-Afghan meeting of the parties when conditions are suitable.

I cannot end my intervention without revisiting the unsettling humanitarian aspects of this crisis. On another occasion, regarding this same matter, my delegation had the opportunity to point out that the precarious human rights predicament of women and girls in Afghanistan

cried out for urgent attention. These concerns have not been alleviated. In fact, the plight of women and girls does not seem to have improved, although we understand that there are some pockets of hope in Khost and other parts of Taliban-controlled territory. The right to education and employment has been denied to them, especially in a situation where the war has made thousands of women widows and therefore the sole breadwinners in their families. Denying them employment, however well-justified on the basis of any principle or religion, is condemning them to destitution. We urge those nations with any influence in this matter to address it most expeditiously.

On 21 and 22 January 1997, an International Forum on Assistance to Afghanistan was held at Ashgabat under the auspices of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. During this meeting important information and ideas were shared on the future humanitarian and development requirements of Afghanistan. We understand that more work is being done by the Department to develop a strategic framework that will address immediate relief issues, as well as long-term development needs and rehabilitation in the country. My delegation believes that the post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan is a critical piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the evolving situation.

We think, however, that concrete plans or actions should not be laid on the table only after a resolution of the conflict, but should be addressed in tandem with the ongoing search for a political solution to the crisis. This approach may in fact galvanize internal support for the overall peace process and can be used as a tool in the ongoing United Nations mediation efforts. This approach is also relevant in the context of the need to broaden the base of political dialogue to include the millions of Afghans living outside Afghanistan who have a stake and therefore a voice in the future of their country.

We cannot encourage or allow the creation of an environment that precipitates any form of forced displacement, giving rise to "ethnic cleansing". We have to speak out loudly against this now, instead of later when more people will have been displaced and more lives lost. The unhappy lessons of Rwanda in 1994 and now Burundi with the policy of *regroupement*, teach us that quick, resolute action is critical if tragedy along these lines is to be averted. We therefore note with hope the assurance given by Mullah Rabbani to the Special Mission that the displaced male Tajik farmers will be allowed to go back to their farms to tend their crops and that their eventual complete return will be honoured.

Finally, the Kenyan delegation completely supports Security Council resolution 1076 (1996) of 22 October 1996 in all its provisions, especially those that rightfully place the United Nations in a positive coordinating position, which enables it to play a central role in the mediation effort. We think that while the efforts of interested parties are important, their efforts must be closely coordinated in order to achieve the best results.

Mr. Owada (Japan): Japan believes that maintaining the territorial integrity and unity of Afghanistan as a stable sovereign State is important for the peace and stability not only of that subcontinent region of Asia, but also of the broader Asian regions adjoining it. It should also be noted that the hostilities in Afghanistan are hampering efforts to tackle such vital problems as the control of drug trafficking and international terrorism. As an Asian nation, we in Japan are gravely concerned about the continuing and worsening armed conflict in that country, and attach great importance to its early and peaceful resolution.

It is against this background that Japan has continued and will continue to support the United Nations, which occupies the central role in international efforts toward this end. We particularly support and greatly appreciate the effort of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, led by Mr. Norbert Holl, to achieve the end.

Despite those efforts of the Mission, however, the situation remains very serious. It should be made clear to all the parties that an attempt to resolve the conflict by military means will not bring about durable peace in that country; rather it will jeopardize the chance of a peace based on national reconciliation, harm relations with neighbouring countries and make enduring unity more difficult.

All factions should be brought to agree to an immediate ceasefire and begin negotiations on the establishment of a national unity government.

Neighbouring countries should refrain from exercising their influence on the factions involved to exacerbate the situation and instead cooperate in a constructive manner with the United Nations in its mediation activities through the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan.

As an Asian nation that should offer its own share of contributions in our common task of restoring peace in

Afghanistan, Japan is keenly conscious of its responsibility to contribute to the peace process in Afghanistan, in keeping with the views I have just outlined. I wish to mention here, in particular, three areas where Japan wishes to offer its contribution.

First, as I stated in this Council Chamber on 16 October 1996, Japan would be prepared to consider offering a venue for a meeting between the parties directly involved, in close cooperation with the United Nations, if and when such an offer could assist in bringing the parties to the negotiating table. We in Japan believe that, as an impartial third party to the conflict in Afghanistan, Japan has a role to play in complementing the activities of the United Nations Special Mission, through inducing the parties in conflict to agree on a ceasefire. Japan is looking forward to the ripening of an opportunity for such a meeting. Japan hopes to be able, when the time is ripe, to provide a forum in which all parties will be able to participate and engage in direct negotiations.

Secondly, in line with this perspective, Japan is engaged in assisting the efforts of the Special Mission, which is endeavouring to promote direct contacts and dialogue between the four major parties: the Dostum, Rabbani, Khalili and Taliban factions. Thus, for example, to those parties which had accepted an invitation — namely, Dostum, Rabbani and Khalili — an opportunity was provided recently in Tokyo for useful preliminary contacts. There Japan explained what it had in mind in the way of contributing to a settlement of the Afghan conflict and urged the parties to cooperate with the United Nations mediation efforts and to start substantive discussions on an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful settlement. Japan is considering making a similar démarche for the Taliban as well.

Thirdly, with regard to assistance to Afghanistan, humanitarian assistance by international organizations and non-governmental organizations should continue in order to expedite the return of refugees to a relatively stable area, depending upon their situation. In the view of my delegation, however, what is equally important, if not more important, will be to start the process of economic cooperation and national reconstruction in an integrated way, together with the efforts for achieving political reconciliation and national unity.

As I also stated last October in this Council Chamber, we should start examining what the possibilities are for offering a hand of help and support to the Afghan parties in their reconstruction and rehabilitation in the context of our endeavours for a peaceful settlement, without waiting for the attainment of a final peace. For this purpose, my country is interested in cooperating with the United Nations, when the time is judged to be right, in the promotion of an international conference in which the problem of post-conflict reconstruction will be examined as a central theme on the agenda for peace in Afghanistan. With this possibility in mind, my Government will be participating in the meeting of the Afghanistan Support Group, to be held in Geneva on 21 April, which will provide an opportunity for exploring the possibilities of such an integrated approach for peace and reconstruction.

An open debate on Afghanistan in the Security Council can achieve the important purpose of opening up a new vista for peace, by means of a number of new ideas focusing the attention of the international community on this conflict-ridden country and offering new, innovative approaches to peace in that region. My delegation hopes that this open debate of the Security Council will succeed not only in drawing the attention of the international community to the dire situation in this often forgotten area of human tragedy, but also in generating new impetus towards attaining durable peace in Afghanistan.

Mr. Gnehm (United States of America): Since this Council last discussed Afghanistan in October, the Taliban have advanced north of Kabul and into central Afghanistan in an effort to push aside their rivals, General Dostum and Commander Massoud. These military moves towards the northern border and the Taliban's extremely conservative social policies greatly alarmed Afghanistan's neighbours. Observers vary on whether the Taliban can prevail over Dostum and Massoud and succeed in taking over the north, but this remains a possibility.

The United States Government has repeatedly urged an end to the fighting and urged a practical dialogue in the spirit of compromise. We have also encouraged others to make this key point, in particular to the Taliban: stability cannot be achieved if one group tries to rule all Afghanistan on its own. All groups must work towards a broadly representative government acceptable to all Afghans.

Let me take this occasion to respond to disinformation that the United States has given support to the Taliban. We do not support the Taliban or any other group. But neither do we put blame on the Taliban for

the ills of Afghanistan, for which all parties are responsible. We have repeatedly and clearly conveyed to parties our deep concerns on terrorist/militant training camps, on narcotics production and trafficking and on human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls. We have reminded the Taliban that it is their responsibility to reassure their neighbours that they have no intention of challenging their territorial integrity or exporting Taliban ideology.

In our view, this Council should remain concerned about the unrelenting flow of weapons and equipment to the warring parties by outside powers, despite the disclaimers we hear from all. So to all those engaged in such resupply, the members of this Council should have only this to say: "You are undermining the cause of peace in Afghanistan and perpetuating the conflict. And, ironically, your efforts are unlikely to change the outcome."

The Head of United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, Mr. Norbert Holl, has worked tirelessly to persuade the warring groups to sit down together and discuss the parameters of a peace. The United States Government commends the enormous efforts and dedication of Mr. Holl and his staff in what must seem to be a thankless and unproductive task. We stand fully behind the United Nations Special Mission. We believe it could succeed in launching a true political process if the Afghan groups were willing to negotiate in good faith.

Many Afghans openly express their hopes and aspirations for their country. They long for peace and security and a government that will restore the economy, the infrastructure and their livelihoods. Much of the populace has accepted Taliban rule — not, I would say, because they want a severe judicial regime or social and religious restrictions imposed on all, but because they are desperate for peace and a semblance of normal life. The Taliban have brought a modicum of peace to much of Afghanistan, but at a real price.

In our view, the Afghan people should not be faced with a stark choice between security with political constraints and social intolerance, and no security at all. The voices of those who want all their fellow Afghans to have a role in selecting their leaders and in determining the social practices for their communities deserve to be heard. The United Nations and our individual Governments should do all we can to ensure that this silent majority has a voice.

Mr. Sáenz Biolley (Costa Rica) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation is pleased to be able to speak in this debate on the situation in Afghanistan.

I should like to begin by saying that Costa Rica gives its unqualified support to the efforts of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to achieve a peaceful negotiated solution to the conflict afflicting that country.

In particular, my delegation supports the efforts of Mr. Holl, the Head of the Special Mission, to begin direct high-level talks between the various parties to the conflict by means of a political meeting. My delegation urges the parties, the Supreme Council for the Defence of Afghanistan and the Taliban, to participate in them actively and in good faith. My delegation is pleased by reports that the three leaders of the factions of the Supreme Council — General Dostum, Commander Massoud and Mr. Khalili — are willing to take part personally in the talks. Costa Rica urges the political leader of the Taliban, Mr. Mullah Rabbani, to participate personally in the meeting.

Costa Rica realizes that it is necessary to promote negotiations among the parties to the conflict, and considers that the sponsorship of the United Nations is indispensable in that regard, as is the friendly pressure of the States that have influence over them. Either by means of a group of friendly countries or by means of an international conference, it is necessary to focus the pressure of the international community on the parties to the conflict to lead them to accept a peaceful negotiated solution to the conflict. This might be a way to enable Afghanistan to return to the path of peace, respect for human rights and democracy. This would put an end to the constant frustrations that have to date characterized the situation in Afghanistan.

My delegation would also like to reiterate the obligation of the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law customarily applied to internal armed conflicts and to respect the human rights of civilians in areas under military control. The human rights of women and children are of particular concern for Costa Rica. They deserve preferential treatment, and any acts of discrimination against them, such as those that have been reported, deserve the unanimous condemnation of the international community. In this connection, the parties to the conflict must be aware that as long as they continue to perpetrate such acts, they will be politically rejected by the international community.

My delegation would also like to express its concern about the situation of refugees and displaced persons. In this connection, we appreciate the humanitarian work of the United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations. My delegation must express its concern about the activities of some of the parties to the conflict, which are undermining the activities of those organizations by impeding their work or detaining their staff.

Costa Rica is also deeply concerned about the transfer of arms and explosive materials, both to Afghanistan and through it to third States. In this connection, my delegation appeals to States that have influence on the parties to halt this flow of arms and to stress to them the need to reach a peaceful solution. Costa Rica is also concerned about the transfer of drugs, as well as of artistic and cultural treasures that are the patrimony not only of the Afghan people but of humanity out of the territory of Afghanistan in order to finance military efforts. This trade is not only illegal but immoral.

Mr. Osvald (Sweden): Later in the debate, the Netherlands will speak on behalf of the European Union. We, of course, stand fully behind that statement.

While the people of Afghanistan has now endured 18 years of war, there are no indications that the warring parties will heed repeated international appeals for peace and a negotiated settlement. On the contrary, there are reports that the fighting could intensify when spring arrives. Innocent men, women and children will continue to suffer the intolerable agonies of war.

A negotiated settlement, beginning with an immediate ceasefire and the formation of a broad-based transitional government, and ultimately followed by democratic elections, is the only acceptable road to peace in Afghanistan. Although the Afghan conflict can, in the end, be resolved only by the Afghans themselves, the international community must, in good faith, contribute to such a solution. Such a contribution should consist of the following elements.

First, outside involvement and interference in the conflict, including the continued supply of arms to the warring parties, must cease. Sweden calls on all States to strictly observe the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, and we encourage all States to commit themselves, as the members of the European Union have done, not to deliver arms to Afghanistan.

Secondly, the United Nations is the most appropriate and credible facilitator for a political settlement between the Afghan parties. All possible support must be given to the United Nations Special Mission and the Secretary-General's special representative, Mr. Norbert Holl, in his efforts to bring about the restoration of peace, normalcy and national reconciliation in Afghanistan. It should be in the interest of all States, in the region and elsewhere, for contributions to the peace efforts to be channelled through or closely coordinated with the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan. Only in this way can the international community provide concerted and increased pressure on the Afghan parties to resolve the conflict peacefully, and thus promote regional stability in the long term. Competing international efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement risk being exploited by the parties.

Thirdly, the continuing violations of human rights and in particular the increasing discrimination against women and girls, are a cause of great concern. The international community must give voice to this concern and demand that these rights be respected. Human rights standards are universal and must not be dishonoured or subject to negotiation. Another source of grave concern is drug trafficking, with its far-reaching negative effects both inside and outside Afghanistan. Again, concerted international efforts are necessary to confront this dangerous threat not only to the health and well-being of individuals but also to the peaceful development of Afghanistan. Sweden is also concerned by reports of the continued use of Afghanistan as a training base for terrorist activities.

Fourthly, continued humanitarian assistance by the international community could contribute positively to the peace process, as well as to national reconciliation and rehabilitation in Afghanistan. Sweden has for many years been one of the major donors of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We have worked hard to help alleviate the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and to assist in the reconstruction of that tormented nation.

Afghanistan is a country in desperate need of peace and a chance to rebuild and start anew. It is ultimately for Afghanistan itself — all its people, all its leaders — to make that decision. If it makes the right choice, I am convinced that the international community will not be found wanting in supporting Afghanistan on the road to a better future.

The President: There are a number of speakers remaining. With the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting now.

The meeting was suspended at 6.30 p.m.